WHAT IS THE CAPE COD COMMISSION?

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The Cape Cod Commission was created in 1990 by an Act of the Massachusetts General Court and confirmed by a majority of Barnstable County voters.

In the wake of an unprecedented growth boom in the 1980s, the Cape Cod Commission Act found that the region known as Cape Cod (Barnstable County) possesses unique natural, coastal, historical, cultural and other values which are threatened by uncoordinated or inappropriate uses of the region's land and other resources.

The Commission was established as a regional planning and regulatory agency to prepare and implement a regional land use policy plan for all

of Cape Cod, review and regulate Developments of Regional Impact, and recommend designation of certain areas as Districts of Critical Planning Concern.

The Commission is a department of Barnstable County and is funded by the Cape Cod Environmental Protection Fund.

Commission makeup

The Commission is made up of 19 members representing each of Barnstable County's 15 towns as well as the County Commissioners, minorities, Native Americans, and a governor's appointee. They are citizen volunteers who guide a professional staff to plan for Cape Cod's future growth, provide technical assistance to towns,

review and vote on major developments and act as the Commission's liaison to their communities.

Commission planners and technical staff have expertise in a wide variety of areas including: landscape architecture, land use planning, economic development, affordable housing, historic preservation, wetland and wildlife resources, water resources, coastal resources, waste management, transportation planning, communications and computer mapping. Staff is available to discuss specific issues or projects with local officials, project proponents, and the public.

Unplanned growth

Cape Codders know that their home is a fragile and beautiful place that can be ruined by lack of planning and inappropriate development.

In a scientific poll, Cape residents said overwhelmingly in 1991 that they want the Cape Cod Commission to protect groundwater, encourage only clean, light industries, cultural facilities and

neighborhood businesses, and restrict development which they feel harms the character of the Cape. A large majority of them opposes new, large hotels, malls and factory outlets.

Unplanned growth brings with it a host of prob-

lems — negatives which affect Cape Codders' everyday lives. Traffic jams, mounting trash and water quality problems, congestion of a once-rural Cape Cod are all warnings that we need strong regional planning for Cape Cod.

The Commission's work is divided into three major areas: planning, technical assistance and regulation.

Planning

Regional Policy Plan

The foundation for the Cape Cod Commission's work is the Regional Policy Plan, copies of which are available from the Commission. Hundreds of individuals participated in numerous public meetings and committees which shaped the Plan, which was adopted in summer, 1991.

Each section of the Plan includes an overview of inter-related issues which affect the future of Cape Cod: land use, natural resource protection, economic development, transportation, capital facilities, waste management, open space, energy, affordable housing, and community character. It provides standards and predictable ground rules for new development, and action plans for the Commission and local communities. The Plan emphasizes the need for sustainable, high-quality development.

Local Comprehensive Plans

The Commission Act encourages towns to develop Local Comprehensive Plans (LCP) to apply the policies from the Regional Plan. With an LCP, each town has the opportunity to guide future development. In the LCP, a town may designate "growth centers" and plan how the community will look for years to come.

The Act requires that Local Plans be consistent with the Regional Plan, but towns can tailor the plans' broader goals and policies to their individual needs.

Adoption of an LCP can determine such things as whether local roads end up clogged with traffic, whether the local pond will be swimmable, and whether historic village centers will continue to

thrive. Towns with certified plans can streamline permitting through development agreements, and charge fees to offset the impact of developments.

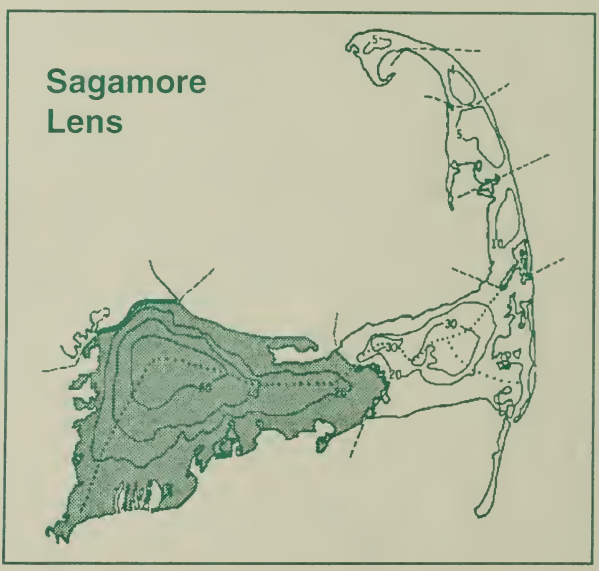
Technical

Here are some examples of planning and technical assistance provided by the Commission. The list includes past successes and continuing services.

- *Economic Development*: the Commission has created a nationally recognized Heritage Tourism program and a business statistics database called "CapeTrends," and put together an inventory of available land for clean, light industry. The Commission serves as a public information center for businesses; provides technical assistance to such groups as Lower Cape Community Development Corporation, Hyannis Vision Group, Cape Cod Lifestyle Council and others, and promotes the marine high tech and science industry.
- *Affordable Housing*: the Commission has organized the Barnstable County HOME Consortium, which allows the Cape to receive millions of dollars in federal housing funds; has created the Soft Second Mortgage Program to aid first-time home buyers; and obtains funds for rental assistance and rehabilitation programs.
- *Waste Management*: the Commission assists Cape towns with solid and hazardous waste issues such as landfills closings, waste transfer stations, recycling, and household hazardous waste pickups.
- *Transportation*: the Commission works to obtain state and federal funds through a Long Range Transportation Plan; updates annual traffic counts and accident data; studies major roads to improve flow and safety; helps towns get the most for their road repair dollars.
- *Design Guidelines*: the Commission has created a manual of guidelines and suggestions to help towns and developers design projects to fit into Cape Cod's sense of place.
- *Geographic Information System (GIS)*: the Commission provides maps to towns worth tens of thousands of dollars which help convey com-

plex technical and planning issues in easy to understand graphical form. Among maps created to date are areas which contribute to drinking water supplies, underground storage tanks, zoning, and the Cape's road network.

● *Water Resources*: the Commission helps protect the Cape's sole source aquifer, the fragile system of underground lenses which supplies



drinking water for all Cape Codders, and is studying and helping to protect such sensitive resources as marine embayments, which rely on clean groundwater. The Commission helps plan future water supplies; is supporting the cleanup at Otis; and has gotten Cape concerns into proposed changes to state septic regulations.

Regulatory

Development of Regional Impact (DRI)

The idea behind regulatory review by the Commission is that there are certain projects, which due to their size, location or character, affect more than their immediate surroundings.

For example, a proposed commercial development may result in increased traffic congestion on Route 28 in two towns. The Cape Cod Commission Act calls such projects Developments of Regional Impact (DRI).

Examples include commercial development of more than 10,000 square feet or residential development of more than 30 units. The Commission weighs the benefits and detriments of each project, checking that the proposed development meets goals and minimum performance standards in the Regional Policy Plan for such issues as water quality, traffic flow, historic character, open space, affordable housing, and economic development.

To be approved, the benefit to Cape Cod of a project must outweigh its detriment; it must be consistent with the local and regional plan and local development bylaws, and consistent with regulations of a designated District of Critical Planning Concern, if applicable.

After a project has been referred, the Commission has 60 days to hold a public hearing. The hearing period must close within 90 days. Following the hearing period, the Commission has 60 days to issue a decision unless there is mutual agreement to extend the review period (it is often shorter).

Conditions attached to an approval can require developers to pay their fair share toward solving problems resulting from their developments, such as making traffic improvements, or providing affordable housing in new residential developments.

Attending DRI hearings is a direct way to have a say in this process. Cape citizens are encouraged to present comments at the hearings or in writing. Public participation in DRI review can help ensure that the Commission is kept informed about impacts on Cape communities.

District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC)

The Cape Cod Commission Act provides another tool to shape development and protect resources that require special attention: the District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC). The DCPC enables a town or towns to adopt new regulations for a specific area, allowing great flexibility for preserving significant ecological features or promoting particular types of development, such as agriculture, aquaculture, or downtown revitalization.

For further information, please call the Cape Cod Commission at (508) 362-3828.

Common questions

● I want to build a new home. Where do I get my permits?

A) From the town. The Commission has a policy of not reviewing single-family homes except under rare circumstances involving some historic structures not otherwise protected.

● I'm a small business operator and want to build a new facility. Do I have to be reviewed by the Commission?

A) Probably not. The vast majority of Cape small business are too small to be subject to Commission review. Call us to find out if your project is one of the few which does trigger review as a DRI.

● How do I find out what the Commission is doing to help my town, or what projects it is reviewing?

A) Call for a free subscription to our twice-monthly newsletter.

● Our village association would like to learn more about the Commission. Can you help?

A) Commission members and staff are available as speakers for clubs, community groups, or any gathering.

● How do I get an answer to a question about the Commission?

A) Call 508-362-3828, and we will do our best to get you an answer right away.